

# COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

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### **Davis, Van Hollen Announce Hearing Into** **Washington Nationals Cable Rights Dispute**

*Why Aren't More Nats Games Available to Comcast Subscribers?*

**What:** Government Reform Committee Hearing,  
"Out at Home: Why Most Nats Fans Can't See Their Team on TV"

**When:** FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2006, 12:30 P.M.

**Where:** ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

**Background:** Washington baseball fans waited more than 30 years for the national pastime to return to the Nation's Capital. Now, in the second year of the Washington Nationals existence, Nats fans are still waiting for the team's games to be widely available on TV.

For 1.3 million Comcast customers in the Washington area, fewer than 40 Nats games will be carried during the 2006 season – only those games shown on local channels WDCA-TV (Channel 20, in most areas) and WTTG-TV (Channel 5).

Customers of Cox cable, RCN cable, the DirecTV satellite service, and other smaller networks will have the ability to see almost every Nationals game, since those systems have chosen to carry the Mid-Atlantic Sports Network (MASN), which has rights to broadcast Nats games.

Before MASN reached agreement with DirecTV midway through the 2005 season, the lack of access to Nationals games was so bad that play-by-play man Mel Proctor actually gave out his cell phone number and asked anyone watching the game to call him. One call came in – from a technician in the production truck outside.

This hearing will examine the dispute that is preventing the Nationals games from being widely carried. Nationals fans deserve to understand why they can't always watch their favorite team.

The Mid-Atlantic Sports Network is a partnership between Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos and Major League Baseball (the owner of the Nats) to broadcast Orioles and Nationals games as well as other sports programming. MLB paid Angelos \$75 million to be a 10 percent partner in the MASN venture. This arrangement was made in part so that Major League Baseball could avoid litigation with Angelos for moving the former Montreal Expos to Washington, so close to the Baltimore market.

The MASN business concept was an affront to Comcast Corporation, which offers its own regional sports network. Comcast attempted to obtain the right to carry Nationals games but ultimately lost out to Angelos and the upstart MASN. If viable, MASN will compete directly with Comcast SportsNet for the right to carry the Wizards, Capitals, and other live sports events.

Comcast and MASN have failed to reach an agreement for Comcast cable to carry Nationals games. Because Comcast is the dominant cable provider in the Washington region, this means the great majority of viewers will not be able to see most games.

On June 14, 2005, MASN filed a complaint against Comcast with the Federal Communications Commission alleging that Comcast had violated FCC rules by refusing to carry MASN. The complaint remains pending before the FCC.

In addition to hearing from Angelos and Comcast, the Committee will hear testimony from Major League Baseball, Cox Communications and a variety of locally elected officials whose constituents are adversely affected by the standoff.

#### **Witnesses:**

##### Panel I

Bob Dupuy, President and Chief Operating Officer, Major League Baseball  
Peter Angelos, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Baltimore Orioles  
David L. Cohen, Executive Vice President, Comcast Corporation  
Gary McCollum, Vice President and Regional Manager, Cox Northern Virginia

##### Panel II

Anthony A. Williams, Mayor, District of Columbia  
Peter V. R. Franchot, Delegate, Maryland House of Delegates  
Douglas M. Duncan, Montgomery County Executive  
Sean Connaughton, Chairman, Prince William County Board of Supervisors  
Ian Koski, Editor, NationalsPride.com

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